United Nations A/71/PV.71

General Assembly

Seventy-first session

Official Records

71st plenary meeting
Friday, 10 March 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 138 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/71/764/Add.1, A/71/764/Add.2, A/71/764/Add.3 and A/71/764/Add.4)

The President: I should like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/71/764/Add.1 through Add.4, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/71/764, Cabo Verde, Djibouti, Dominica, the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea and Yemen have made the payments necessary to reduce their arrears below the amounts specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in documents A/71/764/Add.1 through Add. 4?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 123 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Draft resolution (A/71/L.59)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolution A/71/L.59.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the following countries: Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, Jordan, Morocco, Nigeria and Pakistan.

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this important meeting. Let me start by quoting the Secretary-General from his latest report, issued yesterday, on measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse:

> "The men and women who serve the causes of the United Nations do so with selflessness and pride under challenging conditions — always difficult, sometimes remote, often austere and dangerous. Together, we promise to protect the weak, aid those in need, uphold the dignity of every human being and serve the cause of peace. We who take this promise seriously will not be complacent. We will not allow the behaviour of anyone who exploits the vulnerable and destroys lives to soil our reputations, diminish our contributions, sow disillusion among our champions or undermine our values." (*A/71/818, para. 4*).

The draft resolution presented to the Assembly today represents a first milestone towards a system-wide approach for the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse. It represents an opportunity to support the efforts of the Secretary-General to prevent impunity. The draft resolution also presents a genuine opportunity for this membership to collectively unite to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse. It places victims at the core of the United Nations efforts by providing them with justice and assistance in combating such

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acts, and calls on those responsible to end impunity and to ensure accountability, while also calling for strengthening and enhancing transparency within the United Nations system.

While acknowledging that the actions of a few will not be allowed to tarnish the achievement of the whole, the presenters of this draft resolution, being major troop and police contributors, for the first time since its adoption, recognize Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), which authorizes the Secretary-General to repatriate troops who have not taken appropriate measures to prevent and hold accountable their personnel. In that regard, it requests the Secretary-General to work with troop- and police-contributing countries to implement this decision.

Finally, I would like to thank the general membership, which has worked tirelessly over the past week to agree on this consensual document. This indeed proves that when women and children are victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. The membership will spare no effort to bring them justice and to collectively act to protect those who rely on the United Nations for protection. The troop- and police-contributing countries presenting this draft resolution took it upon themselves to lead this effort in order to send a strong, unequivocal message that it is our responsibility to combat sexual exploitation and abuse, not just among uniformed personnel but also across the United Nations system. We owe it to the international community and to the world to adopt this draft resolution.

The President: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/71/L.59.

Before giving the floor to the speaker in explanation of vote before the voting, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Nayan (Philippines): We recall that Secretary-General António Guterres, who as early as April 2016, when he was still then a candidate for the post, called for eradicating once and for all the exploitative and abusive conduct of those United Nations agents who do not represent what the Organization stands for. Yesterday the report (A/71/818) of the Secretary-General on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse was issued, representing a new approach that focuses on the imperative to address the issue through a system-wide approach that seeks to build a strong partnerhsip with Member States. Today, we have draft resolution A/71/L.59 before us on this very issue, which if not addressed will continue to tarnish the image of the Organization.

While the Philippines supports the draft resolution and recognizes the initiative of some of our fellow troop-contributing countries as main sponsors of the draft resolution, we wish to convey the following concerns.

First, on the process, the draft resolution, while presented as a consensus text, was not formulated through a more transparent and inclusive process of consultations with Member States that would have allowed all views to be heard and considered. A very tight timeline and a rush to adopt the draft resolution did not allow us to consider fully the just-issued report of the Secretary-General, which could have enriched our discussions and the draft resolution.

Secondly, on substance, we would have wanted the draft resolution to highlight the protection of children, the most vulnerable and most in need of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, especially in conflict situations. It is an inherent priority within the broader obligations of the United Nations to protect civilians. Today, six peacekeeping missions and three special political missions have child-protection mandates. More than 100 child-protection staff are deployed to these missions. This clearly illustrates that children are extremely vulnerable members of communities where peacekeeping missions operate, and that peacekeepers have an obligation to both promote and adhere to international norms and standards developed by Member States on child protection.

We all agree that the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse not only undermines the values and principles of the United Nations but also erodes the trust of the peoples we have vowed to protect. It is inexcusable; it is unacceptable; it has no place in the United Nations system. The Philippines stands in solidarity with the community of responsible nations and remains steadfastly committed to ending sexual violence whenever and wherever it occurs. We will continue to hold our Philippines troops accountable to the highest standards of conduct.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/71/L.59, entitled "United Nations action on sexual exploitation and abuse".

I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. Pollard (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that, since the submission of the draft resolution, and in addition to those delegations listed in the document, the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/71/L.59: Belarus, Benin, Djibouti, Eritrea, Indonesia, Nepal, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Suriname and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/71/L.59?

Draft resolution A/71/L.59 was adopted (resolution 71/278).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Iguanez (Malta): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this position.

The EU promotes collective action to maintain and implement the highest standards of conduct and to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse. We strongly support the Secretary-General's leadership in dealing with this difficult challenge, which calls for a system-wide response based on the pillars of prevention, enforcement, victim support and accountability.

The EU welcomes the efforts of the Secretary-General to work closely with Member States on structural, legal and operational measures to make zero tolerance a reality, and advocates a victim-centred strategy rooted in transparency, accountability and ensuring justice. The establishment of the task force on United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse is a clear sign of the Secretary-General's determination to develop an ambitious new approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse committed by those serving under the United Nations flag. The EU and its member States look forward to studying in detail the report (A/71/818) submitted by the Secretary-General yesterday.

Almost exactly one year ago, the adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) was an important step, on which the General Assembly should build and develop further actions for a system-wide approach. General Assembly resolution 70/286, on peacekeeping cross-cutting issues, addresses this issue in a comprehensive and transparent way and provides for the necessary tools to effectively enforce a zero-tolerance policy and represents another major step forward in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, recognizes that women and girls are more often the targets of sexual exploitation and abuse, due to the embedded gender inequality in societies, which is yet another important aspect of our common efforts.

There must be no backsliding on what we have agreed; we owe it to the victims and our own contingents to set high standards and stick to them. We must stand by the objective of enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations in delivering. In that spirit, the European Union would have preferred to undertake collective efforts to upgrade our action in a consistent and inclusive manner, in the framework of due and equitable consultation with all stakeholders. Added value can be achieved only through a collaborative and trustful atmosphere aimed at providing a comprehensive response to a comprehensive problem within an appropriate time frame. Instead, partners were forced into a distracting and rushed process that could have potentially jeopardized the integrity of our results achieved so far.

Even if consensus were eventually achieved due to flexibility on all sides, the path leading to it missed an opportunity to explore the full potential of our efforts, including the results of ongoing discussions in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (Committee of 34). We missed an opportunity to take important steps forward on this issue, which is regrettable. In addition, this came at a time when we have a clear signal from the Secretary-General and there is need for the General Assembly membership to unify around the objective of achieving the highest standards.

While we are not opposed in principle to discussing sexual exploitation and abuse in the plenary, we wish

to underline that this cannot preclude the mandates of governing structures such as the Committee of 34, the Fifth Committee and the Sixth Committee. We will continue our work to strengthen the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse in the competent committees.

The European Union and its member States have consistently expressed their principled position on the policy of zero tolerance, and therefore the approach of zero impunity for all United Nations personnel and personnel serving under United Nations mandates, as advocated by the Secretary-General. The European Union encourages enhanced coordination and collaboration across the United Nations in this regard, and will spare no effort to build a system-wide approach to sexual exploitation and abuse through genuine consultation and cooperation.

The European Union and its member States are committed to working in the long term with the Secretariat and in a spirit of genuine cooperation with all troop-contributing countries and all stakeholders in combating and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, including through the training of all personnel, ensuring that allegations are duly investigated and that justice is served by the countries that contributed the personnel, and in providing victims with the assistance they require.

Ms. Wilson (Australia): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of a broad group of countries, including Canada, New Zealand and Switzerland, in addition to the Philippines and Liechtenstein.

We welcome this opportunity for the General Assembly to take a strong position against sexual exploitation and abuse. We condemn in the strongest terms all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeeping personnel and staff, including against children, who are often the most vulnerable. Not only is sexual exploitation an egregious betrayal of trust, but it undermines the ability of United Nations staff and representatives to effectively carry out their mission, including on peacekeeping missions. In that regard, Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) was a milestone and a positive step in the right direction.

We have mixed feelings about the adoption of resolution 71/278 today. We feel that we have a resolution that is far from what it could have been in terms of its ambition, and we firmly believe that the General Assembly is capable of so much more. Nevertheless, the group welcomes the inclusion of language that affirms the application of the zero-tolerance policy across the whole United Nations system, the recognition that a culture of impunity can lead to more sexual exploitation and abuse being committed, the centrality of victims in all our efforts and the request for the Secretary-General to immediately inform Member States concerned about any allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. We hope that this is interpreted by the Secretary-General to ensure much greater transparency.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium), Vice-President, took the Chair.

On the other hand, we also feel that, in many ways, this was a missed opportunity, and we are left with the feeling of concern and frustration with the rushed process. The importance of taking a strong stand against sexual exploitation and abuse means that this critical issue, which is of such fundamental importance to the United Nations, deserves strong and due consideration across the full membership. We do not believe that the process allowed for the broadest possible consultation. For a process that aimed at increasing the transparency of the United Nations in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, it is regrettable that the facilitators chose working methods that did not encourage it.

Looking ahead, let us challenge ourselves to truly work together and concretely move the issue forward to engender a system-wide approach to sexual exploitation and abuse. We must build on the positive momentum of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) and this resolution. We commend the Secretary-General's efforts thus far to achieve not just a zero-tolerance policy, but a zero-case reality. We welcome the Secretary-General's report (A/71/818) on sexual exploitation and abuse that was released yesterday and, again, are very supportive of the victim-centred strategy that is rooted in transparency, accountability and justice. We look forward to discussing it further.

Ms. Connelly (United States of America): The United States welcomes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to effectively addressing the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse and to reaffirming its collective support for the United Nations zero-tolerance policy and the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen its implementation.

Sexual exploitation and abuse inflict significant harm on vulnerable communities — the very communities that look to the United Nations for

protection and assistance in some of the world's most dangerous places. It also undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the United Nations, in particular, when those responsible are not held to account for their deplorable acts. The United States will continue to welcome future engagement with Member States on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

The General Assembly has adopted two recent resolutions on sexual exploitation and abuse. First, resolution 70/286 was adopted in June 2016, following consideration of the Secretary-General's report (A/70/729) on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In December, the Assembly then adopted resolution 71/134, on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission. In both resolutions, the Assembly welcomed the Secretary-General's determination to fully implement the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, reaffirmed the need for enhanced coordination for victim support and agreed to increase transparency measures regarding allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, annual and ongoing discussions in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations on conduct and discipline address aspects of that important issue.

My delegation commends the Assembly for working constructively towards a resolution. That consensus reflects Member State support for the Secretary-General in implementing the sexual exploitation and abuse zero-tolerance policy. It is the result of many delegations' hard work, flexibility and commitment to addressing the issue.

We would like to align ourselves with the statement made on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. While we welcome this agreement by consensus, we believe that this process and its related timelines could have been more broadly consultative, taking into account the level of interest of many different delegations to positively contribute to its outcome.

The United States firmly supports the authority of the Secretary-General to implement the United Nations zero-tolerance policy. We reaffirm his particular obligation to repatriate any peacekeeping units that engage in a pattern of systematic sexual exploitation and abuse and replace contingents whose Governments fail to properly investigate allegations or hold accountable those found responsible. Sexual exploitation and abuse are a problem throughout the United Nations, including the funds and programmes, and Member States and the United Nations, through all of its relevant organs, must work together to prevent acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, hold perpetrators to account and help victims receive the assistance that they need.

Today we affirm that we must all continue to do our utmost to address this cancer wherever it may exist in the United Nations system and promote accountability for perpetrators of those unacceptable acts.

Mrs. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*) First, I would like to reiterate that, as a State Member of the Organization and a troop- and police-contributing country with a long history of participating in various peacekeeping operations, Uruguay attaches the utmost importance to combating cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. In that regard, Uruguay is extremely committed to the zero-tolerance policy in addressing such cases. Similarly, I would like to underscore that, in confronting such incidents, Uruguay has made steady progress in that area by ensuring greater prevention through predeployment training, appropriate oversight in the field and adequate leadership at all levels. There has not been a single case of sexual exploitation and abuse in which a Uruguayan has been involved that has not been properly and expeditiously resolved through due process with the maximum guarantees afforded to the accuser and accused and through taking the appropriate measures with regard to those found responsible for the alleged acts.

Uruguay expresses its satisfaction following the adoption of resolution 70/286, which sends a strong and clear message of condemnation of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as its support for the efforts of the Secretary-General in combating this scourge. However, my delegation would like to align itself with various other delegations in expressing its concern and frustration at the way in which the negotiation process of the resolution was conducted.

The negotiation and adoption of a General Assembly resolution require a reasonable amount of time to conduct consultations among all States Members of the Organization to achieve a quality and consensus-based product. Uruguay believes that the process imposed by the facilitators of the resolution did not take place in a constructive spirit and seriously undermines the transparency and inclusivity that negotiations within the framework of the General Assembly must have.

Since the submission of the first draft on Friday, 3 March, numerous delegations, including Uruguay's, had called for more time in order to receive instructions from their capitals, and those requests were ignored by the facilitators. Moreover, we note that the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, which is discussing the topic of exploitation and sexual abuse, has been meeting simultaneously on a daily basis with several working subgroups, and the overlap of those negotiations with negotiations on this resolution has affected many Permanent Missions' ability to participate in both processes — an undesirable situation that could have been avoided by agreeing to postponing its adoption for a later date. Similarly, extending the deadline for the adoption of the resolution might have enabled us to have some information relevant to the negotiations, such as the report (A/71/818) of the Secretary-General on sexual exploitation and abuse, which was issued only yesterday.

In conclusion, my delegation believes that, while this resolution is a positive step towards dealing with sexual exploitation and abuse, it has not fulfilled all of its potential, and as States Members we must do more. In that regard, Uruguay will work actively with the rest of the membership and the Secretariat to unite our efforts in combating this scourge.

Mr. Guimarães (Brazil): Brazil supported the adoption of resolution 71/278, on United Nations action on sexual exploitation and abuse, because we firmly believe that the General Assembly should be at the forefront of United Nations efforts to strengthen the system-wide implementation of the zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse, through prevention, enforcement and remedial action. My delegation is encouraged by the provisions in the resolution that seek to ensure that the zero-tolerance policy is respected equally by all categories of United Nations personnel, as well as those provisions that address the significant gaps regarding sexual exploitation and abuse practiced by non-United Nations forces operating under Security Council authorization.

As a country firmly committed to the zero-tolerance policy of the United Nations, however, Brazil regrets that the text of the resolution does not place stronger emphasis on prevention. The fundamental rights and dignity of victims are better respected by creating conditions that help to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse from occurring in the first place. The effective prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse requires more than enhanced predeployment training. It is also necessary to reinforce in-mission training, community outreach, awareness-raising and the vetting of personnel. In our experience, objectively identifying and firmly addressing risk factors has proved essential. Increasing women's participation in preventive strategies is also key. All of those elements should have been addressed in today's resolution.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): The delegation of Ukraine aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Malta on behalf of the European Union. We would also like to make some comments in our national capacity.

At the outset, my delegation welcomes the consensus that members reached today on resolution 71/278, despite the limited time allowed for conducting negotiations. We firmly believe that it is vital to address the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in a just, effective and timely manner.

As a troop-contributing country, Ukraine reaffirms its determination to strictly implement a zero-tolerance policy where its peacekeepers are concerned. We acknowledge our responsibility to strengthen the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse and create a system of accountability for perpetrators. We also believe that, apart from protecting local populations from sexual exploitation and abuse, it is also particularly important to ensure that United Nations policy in this area is focused on prioritizing the security and well-being of the victims. In that regard, we are pleased that today's resolution focuses on and tackles the issue of victims.

We pay tribute to the Secretary-General's efforts to implement the zero-tolerance policy of the United Nations on sexual exploitation and abuse, and welcome all the activities planned for prevention, enforcement and remedial action, including support to victims. My delegation firmly believes that the resolution will serve as a clear political signal to all parties concerned on the urgent need to implement a more aggressive approach to United Nations policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

Ms. Stener (Norway): Norway welcomes the Assembly's adoption today of resolution 71/278, on sexual exploitation and abuse. From the beginning of the process leading up to the adoption, Norway supported the idea of a strong and comprehensive General Assembly resolution on sexual exploitation and abuse. As we expressed clearly during the negotiations, my delegation would have preferred to see the

timeline extended in order to allow for more thorough deliberations. That would have enabled us to consider the Secretary-General's report (A/71/818) on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, issued yesterday, and would have contributed to a strong, concerted effort to combat this scourge. We also believe that more time would have helped us to agree on a stronger text with a clearer focus on prevention. For that reason, we chose not to be a sponsor of the resolution.

The time has now come to look forward and work together on a basis of the consensus that has been expressed today, and on the basis of the new report of the Secretary-General. Only by standing together and overcoming our differences will we be able to make the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse a reality on the ground, and to uphold the rights and dignity of the most vulnerable people whom the United Nations is mandated to protect.

Mr. Barro (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): My delegation joins in today's consensus adoption of resolution 71/278. We reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. It is being implemented in various ways, through training and awareness-raising but also by enforcing standards of conduct, conducting investigations and imposing punishment, and by assisting the victims of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations personnel. That is why we continue to believe that, in order to be effective, any resolution on this important issue should be based on a balanced approach that enables us to take due account of the various aspects of the issue. Above all, we believe that a transparent and inclusive negotiation process would have allowed us to dedicate more time and energy to achieving a result.

Mr. Zamora Rivas (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to emphasize the importance that my country, as a Member of the United Nations and a troop-contributing country, attaches to the issue of preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by any troops or personnel of our Organization. El Salvador has consistently spoken out on this issue in the various forums where it has been discussed, but in the framework of the consensus adoption of resolution 71/278, we would like to make the following comments.

First, we were invited to the negotiation process and were able to participate in the discussions. We made some proposals for alternative language, one of which was accepted.

Secondly, looking at the resolution's provisions, we find that it does not contradict what has been agreed on in previous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and is therefore essentially a reaffirmation of those resolutions. We therefore decided to join the consensus. However, we, too, would like to say that this resolution does not represent any progress on an issue that so urgently needs to be dealt with creatively.

Thirdly, El Salvador attaches importance to the right of any country or group of countries to submit draft resolutions to the General Assembly. This is an inalienable right that is accorded us by the Charter of the United Nations and is one of the democratic foundations of the Organization.

But the fact that this resolution has been adopted in no way, shape or form excludes the possibility of the issue being discussed in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and in the Fifth and Sixth Committees, which must continue their discussion and carry out an in-depth analysis of the issue. In that connection, the report (A/71/818) of the Secretary-General and other relevant documents that contribute to such analysis, one of which has just been released, take on the utmost importance owing both to their content and proposed actions, as well as the change in the approach to sexual abuse, which is a first in the history of our institution. Such reports must be carefully analysed and supplemented with new proposals to ensure that we can move forward and institutionalize the policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, something that we all support.

Fourthly, we wish to express our concern at the fact that the process of consultations on this resolution, on the one hand, was not sufficiently inclusive and transparent, as required by the issue, and, on the other, it received only a very brief time for discussion and consultation. Sexual exploitation and abuse is so complex an issue that the various forms often require weeks of consideration, which makes possible a serious-minded assessment of the issue. For this reason, our delegation decided not to co-sponsor the resolution.

In conclusion, I reiterate that El Salvador is committed to improving the mechanisms for prevention and ensuring accountability in all cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system. We will work hard to help the Organization adopt

decisive measures for the implementation of its zero-tolerance policy.

Finally, I ask that my statement be made part of the records of this meeting.

Mr. Dalo (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina joined the consensus on the adoption of this important resolution — resolution 71/278 — as we fully support the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and the measures implemented by the Secretary-General to that end.

My country welcomes the comprehensive treatment of this issue by the General Assembly condemning all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. Nevertheless, we would like briefly to state our agreement in connection with the concerns voiced by other delegations regarding the process used in the adoption of the resolution.

My delegation believes that, in negotiating such an important issue, we should have had enough time for greater consultation with our capitals so as to enable the greater participation of delegations, particularly since there were simultaneous discussions of this issue in the framework of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

Moreover, we believe that the report of the Special Committee, as well as the annual report of the Secretary-General on sexual exploitation and abuse and of the task force set up to come up with a strategy for the Organization on this issue, should have served as sufficient relevant inputs for the negotiations without resorting to an artificially adjusted schedule of meetings.

Argentina will continue to support the measures adopted by the United Nations to bolster the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse, with a focus on prevention and assistance to victims, as well as the Organization's consideration of this issue in all its relevant bodies beginning today here at the General Assembly. We hope in future to count on a negotiation process that is more conducive to the quest for consensus on this issue.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the voting.

I shall now give the floor to those delegations that wish to make statements following the adoption of the resolution.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China congratulates the General Assembly on its adoption by consensus, a short while ago, of resolution 71/278, on sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff. This is the first resolution on the response of the United Nations system to the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse and demonstrates the determination of the membership to combat this scourge. It will also help the United Nations to take more comprehensive measures to deal with this problem, and better help protect the overall reputation of the Organization.

China thanks Egypt for its initiative. We, too, sponsored the resolution and commend the other sponsors for their very positive stance on this issue. Sexual exploitation and abuse is an issue that must be taken very seriously by all departments and agencies of the United Nations system. There is very extensive consensus on this.

United Nations staff, including in the Secretariat, funds and programmes, peacekeepers and the civilian component on the ground have made great contributions to the promotion of world peace and development. Many have lost their lives for the cause. But the negative actions of some have harmed the reputation of the Organization and have compromised the hard-won achievements of United Nations staff.

China firmly supports the fight against acts of sexual exploitation and abuse and supports the zero-tolerance policy adopted by the United Nations system. We welcome the efforts made by Secretary-General Guterres and support the international community's taking of comprehensive measures from the perspective of prevention, accountability, personnel management and protection of victims.

China will continue to work with the wider membership in supporting United Nations management capacity so as to effectively uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and press ahead with the work of the Organization.

Ms. Hailu (Ethiopia): Ethiopia is pleased to co-sponsor resolution 71/278, on United Nations action on sexual exploitation and abuse. We believe that the General Assembly is the appropriate forum for the discussion of this serious issue.

The involvement and active participation of all Member States, including troop-contributing countries,

is indeed critical to finding a comprehensive solution to this scourge, which is tarnishing the image of the United Nations and of the thousands of peacekeepers who continue to risk their lives every single day in the field while executing their mandates on behalf of the international community.

We therefore welcome the adoption of the resolution. We commend Egypt for spearheading the efforts and fully associate ourselves with its statement on behalf of the sponsors. We would like also to express our appreciation to all delegations for their active participation in the negotiation process, as well as for showing flexibility and compromise in order to achieve consensus.

We wish to seize take this opportunity to reiterate our strong condemnation of all acts of sexual exploitation and abuse throughout the United Nations system and to reaffirm our commitment to and support for the implementation of the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. We welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to preventing and combating sexual exploitation and abuse and support the measures he is undertaking, including through the appointment of the Special Coordinator and the establishment of a high-level task force to develop a strategy for improving the United Nations response.

As a major troop-contributing country, we deem the protection of civilians, particularly children and women, who usually find themselves in situations of vulnerability, of the utmost importance. We fully recognize our obligation to ensure that our peacekeepers respect applicable international humanitarian and human rights law. We also provide them with the necessary and adequate predeployment training and civilian protection, including on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse.

We are fully aware of our primary obligation to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, and we have done so whenever we have seen reports of such allegations against our own peacekeepers. However, what we have seen from our own experience is that some of those allegations do not even meet the minimum evidentiary standards. Allegations that are not properly verified and substantiated will not only undermine the credibility of the troop-contributing countries concerned, but also of the United Nations peace operation as a whole. Therefore, we believe that there is an absolute need to handle the matter very carefully. That is why we welcome the adoption of resolution 71/278 today, which underscores the need to ensure accountability, to prevent and combat impunity and to promote credible reporting of allegations with a view to improving the effectiveness of the United Nations in combating sexual exploitation and abuse.

In our view, there is an urgent need to review and standardize procedures for verifying allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse before informing the troop-contributing countries concerned, prior to public reporting — which should uniformly apply to both United Nations personnel and non-United Nations forces operating under a mandate of the Security Council. If, after a proper investigation of allegations, no evidence has been found, all mention of such allegations should be cleared from reports.

Finally, we welcome the Secretary-General's commitment and readiness to engage and consult with member countries and, most important, with troop-contributing countries, in addressing the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse. We must recognize that there is indeed a lot of room for improvement in dialogue on that issue. Let me conclude by expressing our sincere hope that the Secretary-General will demonstrate the necessary leadership in mobilizing all Member States towards the common objective of fighting this scourge, which has tarnished the image and reputation of the Organization.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, we would like to express our gratitude to the States that initiated the adoption of today's resolution 71/278, as well as to all delegations that constructively participated in its drafting.

Despite certain positive developments in recent months regarding statistics on sexual offenses committed by the personnel of various United Nations peacekeeping mission units, it is still a pressing issue that irreparably undermines the authority of the United Nations. I believe that the United Nations and its States Members must do everything possible to prevent and fully eradicate such acts.

Equally disturbing is information about egregious cases of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by military personnel from foreign non-United Nations contingents deployed in conflict areas under a Security Council mandate. The mission of those contingents, like that of the Blue Helmets, is to bring peace and security to countries. Therefore, the same standards of

zero tolerance must be applied to them, regardless of country of origin, identity of the perpetrators or their role in those missions.

Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) has contributed to the discussion of this topic in the United Nations as a whole. However, we maintain that it was adopted by the Council as an exception, given that matters of peacekeeper discipline are not related to the maintenance of international peace and security. Hence, we welcome the resumption of discussions on that issue in the General Assembly, where those matters have been considered for a number of years — both in its Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and in the Fifth and Sixth Committees.

Preventive and precautionary measures have also been included in the resolutions regularly adopted by the General Assembly on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on missions. For instance, the Assembly was actively involved in introducing the practice of predeployment preparation and induction training carried out by States, alongside peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Those measures have yielded concrete results. Indeed, it is the General Assembly that receives the relevant reports of the Secretary-General. We firmly advocate the continuation of that practice, which has proved effective. We believe that it is the involvement of all Member States in developing relevant measures that determines the effectiveness of their practical implementation, and troop-contributing countries should have a particular say in the matter because they possess the full measure of information on why it has so far been impossible to eradicate the phenomenon underlying those deplorable statistics.

Without in any way minimizing the gravity of sexual offenses, we believe that the idea being promoted by a number of States and the Secretariat regarding collective responsibility for such actions is questionable. In our view, the focus should be on good-faith efforts to identify actual perpetrators, establish their guilt and bring them to justice. Another important objective is to adopt measures to prevent such crimes and to properly train and screen uniformed and civilian personnel to be deployed on United Nations missions. The main burden, in the case of troops and police, falls on troop-contributing countries and, in the case of civilian personnel, the responsibility lies with the Secretariat.

Ms. Sayed (Pakistan): We thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to discuss a subject that is of critical importance to us. Today's meeting is part of efforts that began last September to address the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse collectively and holistically, with the aim of finding practical solutions to the problem. We had talked about an overarching General Assembly resolution that would address that issue comprehensively — combining the efforts made in various committees, including the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Fifth Committee. Resolution 71/278, adopted today, sends a clear message that we all stand strong to root out this scourge from the United Nations system. It is a reaffirmation of the commitment to a zero-tolerance policy of sexual exploitation and abuse, and to strengthened preventive, reporting, enforcement and remedial action measures.

The resolution that we just adopted, which Pakistan co-sponsored, looks holistically into the issues that need to be addressed in order to implement the zero-tolerance policy. They include strong support and assistance for victims; genuine accountability to be exercised by Member States as it relates to their personnel; the importance of prevention; combating impunity among non-United Nations forces authorized under a Security Council mandate; strengthening and enhancing transparency within the United Nations system; and including the subject on the agenda of the General Assembly for further discussions.

We appreciate the Secretary-General's proactive approach on the issue and his efforts for ensuring greater transparency and accountability. The resolution is also an expression of our support of the Secretary-General's efforts, strengthening his hands for future endeavours in combating the problem. We look forward to working with him and forming a strong partnership between the Member States and the Secretariat.

The principal sponsors of the resolution include major troop- and police-contributing countries. It is also a reaffirmation that we take our responsibilities as a troop contributor very seriously. We fully support the policy of zero-tolerance and strongly believe that protectors of the vulnerable must not be allowed, under any circumstance, to become the abusers. That would be a travesty of justice and morality and, above all, of the sacred covenant that peacekeepers take upon themselves. We cannot allow the exemplary work of thousands of brave men and women to be sullied by the abhorrent acts of a few.

Our sense of urgency on the subject is clearly based on our collective aim to root out a problem that seriously affects the functioning of the United Nations system. We are ready to work with the Secretary-General on the implementation of a system-wide strategy to respond to sexual exploitation and abuse issues. As mentioned in his report (A/71/818), united in common purpose, we can together become a positive force for change.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): Bangladesh welcomes the consensus adoption of resolution 71/278, entitled "United Nations Action on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse", and wishes to thank all Member States for their active cooperation and support. We recognize the stewardship role played by the delegation of Egypt.

Bangladesh contributes to United Nations peacekeeping missions to uphold at the international level certain values and principles we cherish as a nation. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and other United Nations personnel run contrary to those values and principles and cannot be tolerated. We therefore fully support the urgency attached to prevention, reporting, enforcement and remedial action in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse by those serving under the banner of the United Nations.

It is only logical that the rights of victims should remain at the core of the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse through the implementation of its zero-tolerance policy. Bangladesh commends the Secretary-General for demonstrating his unstinting commitment to this overarching objective. We take note of his comprehensive report contained in document A/71/818 and feel encouraged at seeing a range of constructive and forward-looking recommendations. We acknowledge the work done by the high-level task force set up by the Secretary-General for this purpose and recognize in particular the seminal contributions of his Special Coordinator, Ms. Jane Holl Lute.

We believe the resolution adopted by the General Assembly today has created an opportunity for inclusive, well-calibrated discussions in the plenary on implementing the recommendations made in the Secretary-General's report in tandem with discussions in the relevant committees. This resolution also coincides with the first anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) and brings to closure a proposal put forward by a group of troop- and police-contributing countries at the General Assembly meeting held on 7 September 2016 (see A/70/PV.115). We consider today's resolution to be a work in progress and look forward to further enhancing its contents in the coming years.

Bangladesh joins others in underscoring the need for addressing sexual exploitation and abuse in a decisive and sustained manner through a United Nations system-wide approach. The various layers of screening, oversight, monitoring, reporting, investigation and accountability being introduced throughout the United Nations system should help further strengthen the firewall against such aberrations. Disciplinary and criminal justice measures, in line with corresponding national laws and systems, need to be enforced and reported on with due diligence. Remedial action in support of victims in case of credible allegations is a non-derogable responsibility. The potentials of the trust fund set up for victims must be optimized in a fair and transparent manner.

In his latest report, the Secretary-General identifies some of the best practices from Bangladesh in conformity with our zero-tolerance policy with respect to sexual exploitation and abuse. The trust, confidence and respect that our peacekeepers have earned over the decades cannot be compromised by the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse, for those hosting our peacekeepers must not experience any erosion of faith in those they have turned to for protection. The image, credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations must be preserved and given primacy over any vested interest or short-term gains.

We have shared with the United Nations our readiness to further expand the possible areas of cooperation and engagement in case of any allegation. We remain firm in our resolve to arrive at and maintain zero allegations and combat impunity to uphold the ethos that underpins our participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We are hopeful that, through a game-changing approach by the United Nations and its States Members, sexual exploitation and abuse will be effectively addressed across the system.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 123.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.